

# ZABALAZA NEWS

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## CLEANING OUT SUPER-EXPLOITATION



How can the most harshly exploited workers fight back against the bosses? Cleaning workers throughout South Africa have been on strike since Monday 8 August. They are demanding a living wage of R4 200 per month, as well as a 13th cheque and shorter hours.

Many of these workers are now paid R2 000 per month or even less, and work under the harshest conditions. The vast majority are black, and a great many are women; their supervisors are often racist and sexist bullies of the worst kind. They are frequently compelled to use dangerous chemicals, without even the protection of gloves; these chemicals can make them sick, and some have died as a result.

In last month's talks, employers initially offered a 6% wage increase, subsequently raised to 8%. This means just another R160 to workers who are getting paid R2 000.

On top of this, cleaners have often had difficulty joining unions to protect them. A big problem is that many are outsourced. They work in private companies, government offices, hospitals, universities – anywhere that needs cleaning. But the institutions where they work are frequently not their direct employers: rather, the institution hires a cleaning company such as Supercare or Impact, which employs workers at miserable wages.

A typical story is that of the cleaners at Wits University. Before 2000, Wits employed its cleaners directly at a wage of about R2 000 per month. In 2000, Wits outsourced cleaning, gardening, catering and other support services. It retrenched 613 workers; those cleaners who were re-employed by Supercare received a monthly wage of R1 000 (with inflation-linked wage increases, this had risen to about R2 000 by 2011). These workers also lost many benefits, including free tuition at Wits for their children.

Wits management outsourced

its workers to reduce its wage bill – and to weaken their organisation. The workers were transferred to four different outsourcing companies, and the number of firms has grown. Instead of bargaining together for their wages with one employer, they were broken up to fight four different companies. Nehawu, the main union that had represented the workers at Wits, was completely defeated in the fight against retrenchments, lost most of its members on campus, and has never recovered. Companies like Supercare constantly

ask the state to settle the matter. On past experience, it is quite likely that the state will favour the bosses, now that the workers' greatest weapon of the strike has failed. Why do such betrayals and defeats happen; why do they happen so often?

Unfortunately, most unions today are controlled not by their members but by highly paid bureaucrats who spend more time talking to the bosses than hearing from ordinary workers. All too often, they try to end strikes and make peace with the enemy; they are prepared to accept smaller offers from the bosses in order to stop the strike quickly. Involving more bureaucrats increases the danger.

Another source of weakness and disunity is the fact that the cleaners are striking alone – and here, too, outsourcing is a great weapon for the bosses. A strong union is a union that brings together all the workers in each workplace, each company, each industry, so that when the cleaners strike, they are joined



threaten any workers who join unions or try to organise, and try to ban meetings at the workplace. By dividing workers and preventing organisation, they keep workers frightened and keep wages low. Similarly to labour brokers, that is why these companies exist in the first place.

Nonetheless, the cleaning workers have succeeded in organising a national strike, and have held out for more than two weeks so far, sticking to their demands. Yet even so, the strike in many ways reflects the division and weakness of the workers. This was shown when the SA Transport and Allied Workers' Union accepted management's 8% offer on 28 August, completely betraying the demands of workers, and leaving the other seven unions seriously weakened. With more unions selling out, even those that remain have been compelled to call off the strike from Monday 12 September – not to accept the bosses' offer, but to

by the drivers and the machinists and the clerical workers. This would hit the bosses that much harder. But here, not only are the cleaners striking alone, but thanks to outsourcing they are not even striking against the same bosses!

And on top of that, the bosses have brought in their favourite weapon: scab labour. It's hard to tell where the scabs are coming from, but they are easy to find for jobs like cleaning. All the bosses need to do is head for the townships, find some unemployed people on the street, offer them a couple of days' work. Class consciousness in South Africa today is not strong; many people do not realise how far scab labour weakens the working class.

The one thing that can prevent the employment of scabs is for striking workers to stay on the premises. Solid and permanent picket lines outside are almost as good, but sit-down strikes are

even better. If strikers are always ready to toyi-toyi when scabs appear, who is going to scab? Such actions would be illegal – but the law is there for the bosses, not the workers. This, too, is a problem with union bureaucrats: they live by negotiating and “reasoning” with the bosses, so they don’t want to break the bosses’ laws. If the workers controlled their own unions, and knew who their enemies were, they need have no such scruples.

At Wits, there have been some steps in the right direction. This year, the Wits Workers’ Solidarity Committee has united workers from many outsourcing companies with a small group of Wits students, academics and support staff. The committee has already won one victory: it has forced the resignation of Ian Armitage, a racist Wits manager tasked with dealing with outsource workers, and known for insulting them as “k\*\*\*\*\*s”. This has raised the fighting spirit of the workers as it has never been since 2000.

At the time of writing the committee was campaigning against scabs, calling for their removal from campus. Wits management has been compelled to acknowledge the right of students to speak to scabs and try to persuade them to stop what they are doing. Students have taken action to make a mess on campus, making things harder for the scabs. But this is still too little. How much more could be done if all working-class students joined this campaign? How much more if striking workers were on campus all the time?

This strike is in danger: from many divisions among workers, from union bureaucrats, from scabs. The strike might have been won if workers held firm, if they extended their actions and sought ways to enter the workplaces, if they watched their “leaders” closely to prevent more sellout deals. But how much further could workers go? The Wits Solidarity Committee aims to force the university to end outsourcing and

re-employ workers directly. This will end one major division, and open the way to end others.

All workers and students at Wits – all workers in any workplace – should be united into one big union, facing the bosses as a single great force. Such a union should be controlled not by its bosses but by its members, held together by our common needs and common power as the working class. And One Big Union can bring together all workplaces, all sectors, can reach even beyond the workplace, can bring together employed and unemployed to put an end to scabbing. Such a union, strengthened by an anarchist understanding of the workers’ cause and the workers’ power, can, in the end, be our weapon to smash the oppressor, to remove the bosses, to put an end to exploitation once and for all.

**NO TO SCAB LABOUR! FORWARD  
TO ONE BIG UNION!  
DOWN WITH WAGE SLAVERY!**



## PROTEST AND ELECTRICITY STRUGGLES IN CHIAWELO



Since 2007 Chiawelo in Soweto has been the site of an ongoing class struggle between community members, on the one hand, and the state and Eskom, the fully state-owned electricity utility, on the other. This struggle reached a peak on Tuesday 5th July 2011 when a group of about 200 residents from the community of Chiawelo embarked on a protest to demand the removal of prepaid water meters from the area. The protest came as a response to Eskom after its electricians went to Chiawelo to repair (rather than remove) prepaid electricity meters that had been sabotaged the previous week. Although Eskom said the meters were “vandalised” by “a criminal element”, it is clear that they were in fact sabotaged as part of a broader struggle against prepaid electricity meters and the exorbitant rates people in Chiawelo are being forced to pay for electricity; rates which according to Chiawelo residents, are up to 40 times higher than rates charged to suburbs, and six times higher than those charged to industry per unit than anywhere else in Soweto! When police attempted to disband the protest by force the protesters responded by building barricades in the streets and clashing with the police. When anger and resentment boiled over, the protesters headed to the houses of both the former ward councillor to the area, as well as the home of the current councillor, and proceeded to set fire to both houses, as well as the cars parked in the driveways.

During the protest a 71-year-old granny who was on her way to do her monthly grocery shopping was shot in the head by the police with a rubber bullet.

During the commotion she lost in excess of R1 000; the state grant on which her entire family is probably dependent.

That evening five people were arrested in connection with the protests and burning of the councillors’ property, after being pointed out by men with covered faces working with the police. A few days later another 20 people were arrested. The 25 suspects, including a 14-year-old, appeared in the Protea Magistrate’s Court on charges of public violence, arson, malicious damage to property and attempted murder. They were denied bail and remanded in custody until they are to reappear on September 16th. On Monday 1st August another 20 people were arrested in connection with the protests and attacks on the councillors’ houses, and there are said to be warrants out for the arrest of another 100-odd people. Of the 45 people that are now behind bars, many are innocent, and were not even involved in the protest, never-mind setting fire to the councillors’ houses or sabotaging the prepaid meters. People that were caught on police videotape as having been in the area at the time are accused of orchestrating and participating in the protest and arson attacks, including an off-duty soldier who, according to community accounts of events, went into the councillor’s burning house to rescue a small child that was trapped inside. For this brave and selfless act this person now faces 20-odd years in prison.

Although we may disagree with the tactics employed by some of the people in Chiawelo – such as burning the councillors’ houses, which not only endangered the

lives of innocent people, but also led to the arrest of many other innocent people – it is important that we put these events in context, and take a principled stand of working class solidarity with the accused. This is because, as we shall see, the long-standing struggle against prepaid electricity meters in Chiawelo has implications for the rest of Soweto and South Africa as a whole, and is part of a larger war being waged against the poor and working class globally. It is because of these implications that we feel it is important not to adopt tactics that could serve to alienate other people from the struggle against prepaids in Chiawelo.

Firstly, we need to look at the source of the anger in Chiawelo: the introduction of a new kind of prepaid meter. In 2007, Eskom held a meeting with residents in Chiawelo at which it was explained that the existing system was “unsafe” and that children could get electrocuted if they played near the electricity boxes, and therefore that they needed to be replaced. The replacement boxes were in fact prepaid meters. The meeting was therefore simply a cover for Eskom to claim that it had consulted with the community and had been given the go-ahead for the installation of prepaid electricity meters – which it hadn’t. When residents of Chiawelo realised that they had been duped, they went out in protest, during which a child was shot and killed by the Metro police. To this day nobody has been held responsible for this, and the case has been simply brushed under the carpet.

What is crucial to understanding how the electricity crisis in Chiawelo

affects the rest of Soweto is the fact that Chiawelo has been a testing ground for the installation of a new kind of prepaid meter across the country; according to Eskom itself the 4 000 prepaid meters installed in Chiawelo in 2007 are part of a pilot project (much the same as Phiri was a testing ground for the installation of prepaid water meters). If the project is successful, these new prepaid meters will be installed right across Soweto and the country – indeed, since prepaids were first installed in Chiawelo in 2007 they have already been installed in some other parts of the country. What is cause for concern is that, according to Eskom, the project has been successful – despite community resistance – and Eskom is claiming a massive increase in profit margins in Chiawelo since the introduction of prepaid meters there. In essence, Eskom and the state (since Eskom is a state-owned enterprise) are profiting from the poor.

It is in this context that we must try to understand the growing anger and desperation of the people of Chiawelo, who, since 2007, have been trying by all means to have their grievances addressed by Eskom and the state, and have been met with cut-offs, batons and rubber bullets. It is also in this context that we must try to understand why this pilot project is underway, what impact it could have if the introduction of these prepaid meters spreads to other areas and, then, what might be appropriate strategies and tactics that could be adopted to fight against the introduction and spread of prepaid meters and further exploitation and oppression of the poor.

### **EXPLAINING THE WATER AND ELECTRICITY CRISIS IN SOWETO**

Although the frustration being felt by Sowetans at the escalating costs of water and electricity and their resultant attacks on community councillors is understandable, it is important to recognise that the problem cuts much deeper than corruption and ineffective local government (although these are certainly problems too). Eskom's actions must be understood in the context of the ANC government's neoliberal macroeconomic policy – which is based on a commitment by government not to "interfere" in the market. This policy has some very important implications. For example:

It means that municipalities themselves have been made to run like businesses ("corporatised"). Since 1991 central government subsidies to municipalities for providing services have been slashed by about 85%. Municipalities must therefore raise funds locally via service charges and property taxes. This explains why water is becoming so expensive, and why prepaids have been installed to ensure

that people pay.

State-owned services (like Eskom) must either be privatised, or restructured and run like businesses ("corporatised" and/or "commercialised"), with strict criteria for cost-recovery and profit-making. In fact, under neoliberalism, Eskom's mandate from government has changed: from being a service provider "in the public interest" to being "cost effective", something it has achieved well (between 2000 and 2001 Eskom's profits rose by 37%)!

### **WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR SOWETANS?**

Because Eskom's pilot project in Chiawelo is being hailed by Eskom as a "success" – since it has resulted in higher profit margins at the expense of the poor – it follows that this model will be introduced to other areas from which the state (as Eskom) wishes to squeeze further profits from the poor.

Clearly this project is part of the government's overall economic policy. The reluctance or failure of ward councillors to address the problems in Chiawelo – and other parts of the country – should not be seen as a result of them being corrupt or incompetent (although many of them are), but rather a systemic problem of which corrupt or ineffective councillors are only a symptom. Understood in this light, one can also then see why holding individual councillors to blame is misleading, and why attacking councillors or burning their houses is a poor choice of tactic. The councillors are only implementing national government policies on a local level, and are in fact powerless to influence or change these policies. It doesn't matter which councillors are in office, nor how many we chase out; each replacement will be required by the central government to pursue and implement the very same policies.

We need to recognise that the problems of prepaids, lack of service delivery etc. are the result of government's macroeconomic policy and not just "bad apples" in local government. We therefore need to build a powerful movement that can't be ignored, and can put pressure on national government to revise its policy. Such a movement could also keep councillors in check and guard against corruption by enforcing accountability and transparency through pressure from below. To be able to do so, however, requires the unity of the poor and working class. Since the roll-out of these new prepaid electricity meters on a large scale would effect everyone, particularly the poor and working poor, it is in the interests of all the poor and working poor in Soweto, and South Africa, to unite and struggle together to stop the prepaid project in its tracks; regardless of whether one is Venda or Tswana, or if one

lives in an informal settlement, an RDP house or is a backyard dweller.

### **MORE POVERTY MEANS MORE STATE VIOLENCE**

Because government's economic policy is leading directly to increased poverty, inequality and anger as a result of job-losses, privatisation and cost-recovery measures; the very same policies that are the cause of these problems require that the state step up its securitisation and control over the masses. This is why we are seeing the militarisation of the police, the "shoot to kill" attitude promoted by the likes of Bheki Cele, the shooting of unarmed protesters (such as Andries Tatane and a striking Samwu worker) and the proposed introduction of the Secrecy Bill.

All of these are measures being employed by the state exactly because the bosses and politicians expect there to be more protests, more unrest and more struggles erupting as a response to the increased misery that people are forced to endure as a result of government economic policy.

### **PHANSI PREPAIDS. PHANSI!**

We therefore call on all working class and poor Sowetans to put aside their differences and come together in struggle to stop the system of prepaids in its tracks; we have nothing to lose by working together, yet if we fail to stop Eskom and its prepaids there will be more misery and struggle for us all.

We therefore call for:

- \* The immediate and unconditional release of all people arrested in connection with the Chiawelo protests and sabotage of both prepaids and green boxes. As Eskom has repeatedly failed to address the concerns of the people; as the installation of prepaids and the high cost of electricity – unaffordable for most people – are a direct result of the government's economic policy; and as it was the unnecessary use of force by the police that provoked the "violence" on the part of the community in the first place, the government itself should be held directly responsible for the torching of the councillors' houses.

- \* People to stop informing on and turning people in to the police; this is a problem that effects us all, and we need unity to overcome it.

- \* Eskom workers to refuse to install prepaid electricity meters; today it is Chiawelo, tomorrow it will be the whole of Soweto, and then they too will be expected to pay ridiculously high prices for electricity.

- \* Communities not to allow themselves to be divided along lines of ethnicity or background; but to unite in a common struggle against unjust and anti-poor economic policy.



# BOURGEOIS NATIONALISTS ARE UNDERMINING THE WORKING CLASS IN SA



Anarchism is an idea that stands for the reorganisation of society in order to meet peoples' needs and not for profit, according to the principle, 'from each according to ability to each according to need'.

It was recently reported by various newspapers that 'a "notorious gang of anarchists" with links to cash heists is attempting to destabilise the Gauteng ANC'. ANC provincial secretary David Makhura was quoted as saying that an ANC investigation would 'expose the hidden hand of business people who are fuelling and financing activities that seek to disrupt the functioning of the ANC'. The claims came after a group of disgruntled party members held an unofficial parallel election - allegedly 'organised by a notorious gang of anarchists, most of whom have disciplinary cases' - to decide the party's Tshwane leader.

However, it is quite clear to us, as anarchists, that what is going on within the ANC in Tshwane is not the sinister plot of a group of anarchists, but a factional fight within the leadership of the ruling party - none of whom are anarchists! One faction of the ANC is simply (mis) using the term 'anarchist' as a slander against their internal political opposition. They are using the term as a synonym for 'criminal'. This is incorrect.

It is not us anarchists that are the criminals. It is the politicians inside the ANC, and inside government, that are the criminals. Criminals and liars. Liars for all the broken promises they have made, and criminals for profiting off the misery of the people; while violently repressing any attempt that we make to improve our conditions and fight for our rights. In fact, these factional fights within the ruling party are fights over who is going to be able to loot state coffers through their positions in the ruling party and the state. Stealing and mispending public money - money that should be used to build houses and hospitals, develop public transport and deliver services is, in our opinion, criminal.

It is nothing new for the ruling class - the bosses and politicians - to resort to using the term 'anarchist' to defame and vilify their enemies, even when their enemies are not anarchists. Indeed, through generations of incorrect use of the term anarchist the word has taken on a meaning very different to what anarchism, and anarchists, really stand for. Anarchism is not about violence or crime, nor chaos and disorder. It is certainly not about using politics to get rich looting state coffers. Anarchism is a political ideology that stands for freedom, equality and social justice. Indeed, it is because of this very commitment to

freedom and equality that anarchists would want to have nothing to do with the ANC, which is an anti-poor party that does not, and cannot serve the interests of the majority of the people in South Africa. The ANC has consistently shown itself to be both anti-poor and anti-democratic. While we anarchists do oppose the bourgeois nationalist project of the ANC, we are not interested in participating in any way in its leadership structures; nor using these to get comfortable positions in government, where we would have access to state resources.

Those people who want a real future for the majority black working class belong with the organisations of the workers and poor, and not with the ANC. We anarchists have no ties to businessmen nor cash heists, because we are not interested in enriching ourselves. We are workers for the revolution and, as such, believe that Cosatu's time and energy - and that of other workers, students and the unemployed - would be better spent building a serious grassroots campaign within the townships and poor communities to make real the promise of 'a better life for all' - by imposing our demands on the ruling class - instead of wasting its time campaigning for the ANC, begging for crumbs from the master's table and being diverted by the factional squabbles of the ruling class.



## WHERE WE STAND



We, the working class, produce the world's wealth. We ought to enjoy the benefits.

We want to abolish the system of capitalism that places wealth and power in the hands of a few, and replace it with workers self-management and socialism. We do not mean the lie called 'socialism' practised in Russia, China, and other police states - the system in those countries was/is no more than another form of capitalism - state capitalism.

We stand for a new society where there will be no bosses or bureaucrats. A society that will be run in a truly democratic way by working people, through federations of community and workplace committees. We want to abolish authoritarian relationships and replace them with control from the bottom up - not the top down.

All the industries, all the means

of production and distribution will be commonly owned, and placed under the management of those working in them. Production will be co-ordinated, organised and planned by the federation of elected and recallable workplace and community committees, not for profit but to meet our needs. The guiding principle will be "from each according to ability, to each according to need".

We are opposed to all coercive authority; we believe that the only limit on the freedom of the individual is that their freedom does not interfere with the freedom of others.

We do not ask to be made rulers nor do we intend to seize power "on behalf of the working class". Instead, we hold that socialism can only be created by the mass of ordinary people. Anything less is bound to lead to no more than replacing one set of bosses with another.

We are opposed to the state because it is not neutral, it cannot be made to serve our interests. The structures of the state are only necessary when a minority seeks to rule over the majority. We can create our own structures, which will be open and democratic, to ensure the efficient running of everyday life.

We are proud to be part of the tradition of libertarian socialism, of anarchism. The anarchist movement has taken root in the working class of many countries because it serves our interests - not the interests of the power seekers and professional politicians.

In short we fight for the immediate needs and interests of our class under the existing set up, while seeking to encourage the necessary understanding and activity to overthrow capitalism and its state, and lead to the birth of a free and equal (anarchist) society.



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